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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000983

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: ANKARA'S UIGHUR PARADOX

REF: ANKARA 976

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Despite President Gul's recent trip to China, the GOT leadership has vocally condemned Chinese Government actions against the ethnically Turkic Uighurs in Urumqi. PM Erdogan characterized the violence as a "massacre" and called on Beijing to end its siege. Reflecting Erdogan's pledge to bring the issue before the UNSC, FM Davutoglu has reportedly reached out to regional leaders including UK, French, and Iranian foreign ministers to encourage additional pressure on the Chinese Government. Having taken such a forward-leaning position, the administration is now precariously caught between pandering to domestic public outrage, staving off harsh criticism from opposition parties for not taking a harder stance, and alienating Beijing to the detriment of the Turkish economy. Once domestic concerns are met, the GOT may try to tamp down its heated rhetoric. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) As part of a larger trip to China intended to increase bilateral economic ties, President Gul toured Urumqi, Xinjiang Province, June 28-29, at the Chinese Government's invitation. During this visit, Gul stated that the ethnically Turkic Uighur population should act as a bridge of friendship between Turkey and China. According to MFA official Murat Lutem, Gul's message was meant to ease Chinese fears that the GOT sought to integrate the Uighurs into the Pan Turkic world. Lutem emphasized that such Chinese concern is unfounded and that Gul's visit to the region should be seen in the context of a push for stronger bilateral economic relations. Although President Gul underscored this point during public statements, Lutem complained that the Chinese media downplayed the economic nature of the visit and focused on the scant political items that were taken up in official bilateral meetings. After the outbreak of violence throughout Xinjiang Province began on July 5, high-ranking Turkish officials made a series of statements voicing Ankara's disapproval of the situation. Claiming the incidents had reached the level of a "massacre," PM Erdogan told the Turkish press that Turkey would bring the issue before the UNSC because "there are things that fall on our shoulders on behalf of humanity." Gul, however, has not made public statements so far on the issue.

13. (C) Foreign Minister Davutoglu has echoed Erdogan's sentiments. He stated that it was not possible for Turkey to accept such images of violence, pledging to raise the issue with the Chinese Government and to seek the support of the

United States, United Kingdom, and other countries and international organizations. Davutoglu told the press that he had summoned the Chinese Charge d'Affaires to the Ministry and stated that he would also call Chinese FM Yang to express Turkish concerns. Davutoglu later made public that he had called the foreign ministers of Britain, France, Iran, and other regional governments to solicit additional condemnation of Beijing's actions. The MFA released a less-politicized statement noting "the incidents should not get worse and relevant groups should act with moderation to avoid new tensions and any aggravation of violence. We (the MFA) hope that the Chinese officials, while trying to achieve order and stability, will focus foremost on the security of the civilian population and act meticulously in order not to violate international human rights norms and principles."

¶4. (C) Opposition party leaders have used the situation to continue their attacks on the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Bachel questioned "where is the big hero of Davos now?" -- alluding to Erdogan's politically-oriented heated condemnation of the Israeli Government actions in Gaza at the World Economic Forum in February. Not to be outdone, Republican Peoples Party (CHP) leader Baykal erroneously attempted to criticize Davutoglu by commenting that he should have called the Chinese Ambassador, not the Charge, to the Ministry. The pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) capitalized on GOT outrage against the Uighurs to issue a statement condemning the "massacre" and urging that "countries (read Turkey) experiencing similar domestic problems draw lessons from these sad events."

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¶5. (C) The Turkish media continues to feature flashy, front-page stories condemning the Chinese Government and sympathizing with the Uighurs (reftel). Frequently referring to the Xinjiang Region as "East Turkistan," the press has appealed to the traditional sentiment in Turkish culture that the Turkic Muslim Uighur minority in China are "blood brothers." Reflecting this emotion, far-right "Ortadogu" used the headline "Streams of Turkish Blood Are Flowing." Mainstream secularist "Hurriyet" emphasized that the Uighurs cannot defend themselves against the Chinese soldiers, who outnumber the group by "three hundred to one." Mainstream "Vatan" asserted that "The world is not reacting to the massacre because of the fear of China's economic and nuclear power." Islamist-oriented "Yeni Safak" simply led with "HORROR." Steering far clear of front page sensationalism, influential columnists are relatively silent on the issue. This is most likely an attempt to avoid falling into the trap of promoting ethnicity-based succession.

¶6. (C) Although not to the level of Gaza, the Turkish public has responded with concern and outrage against the violent treatment of fellow Muslims and Turkic people. On July 8, a crowd of approximately 100 staged a protest outside the Chinese Embassy in Ankara. A larger demonstration occurred in Istanbul. The Turkish Consumers Union announced that they would declare a comprehensive campaign to boycott Chinese products. Additionally, many AKP and MHP MPs have announced their resignation from the Turkey-China Friendship Group in protest of the ongoing violence in Xinjiang, many decrying the situation as "inhumane." The Embassy has received a series of faxes and e-mails proclaiming that the Turkish people will end the "Uighur genocide," and advocating a boycott of Chinese products.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: The events in Urumqi are touching upon many of the same pan-Muslim emotions the Turkish public felt during the Gaza crisis. Unlike Gaza, most Turks do not feel an intense historic Ottoman connection to the Xinjiang Region. Still, there is a pervasive sense of a Turkic bond to the Uighurs that is being heightened by the media drumroll. Erdogan now faces the challenge of displaying adequate outrage to satisfy his support base, which has come

to expect Davos-like indignation over the oppression of Muslims. He also needs to stave off opposition criticism -- while not crossing the line with Beijing. Given that the Turkish-Chinese Business Council in Istanbul July 7 signed six agreements to increase economic ties worth \$56.1 million, and Gul's tin-cupping China trip, the GOT finds itself in an unwelcome bind.

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